

Annals of Eugenics

A Journal of Human Genetics
Vol. XIII. Part 4. April 1947

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to malnutrition a state of affairs that is due to a multiplicity of causes of which malnutrition may not even be among the more important? Very possibly the data for a complete answer to this question do not exist, but it is at least worth suggesting that malnutrition is hardly the most probable cause of tiredness and prolonged convalescence among Dr. Bicknell's richer patients.

Fortunately there is available another measure of the state of the nation from which we are entitled to take some small encouragement. The Ministry of Health's report for the year ended March 31st, 1946, shows that during this period, which marked the "difficult transition from war to peace," the public health was maintained at the same high level as in the six years of war. Clinical surveys of various groups of the population had shown that nutrition remained generally good; the average increases in height and weight of school children were higher than in 1940 or in the year before the war; and mortality from disease in every year of life from one to fourteen had reached new low levels—significantly lower than those of 1944 and far lower than those of 1939, which themselves had shown substantial improvements on the levels previously recorded. The infant mortality rate—46 a thousand live births—was slightly higher than in 1944, but still well below that of any preceding year. Again, in the year under review, maternal mortality

was the lowest ever recorded—1.80 a thousand as against 1.92 in 1944.

It may be argued with reason that other factors than nutrition must have been responsible, at any rate in part, for all this saving of maternal and child life: for instance the more extensive and more skilled use of sulphonamide drugs and penicillin in the treatment of infective disorders. And unquestionably some of the credit must go to them. They cannot, however—the tubercle bacillus being sulphonamide- and penicillin-resistant—have influenced the trend of tuberculosis mortality, which after the wartime rise had resumed its downward course in spite of such adverse factors as shortage of sanatorium accommodation and skilled nursing.

The progress recorded by the Ministry does not prove of course that all is well with our nutrition; but it is fair to conclude that all cannot be ill with it either. If nutrition cannot be solely credited with the low mortality levels in the past year, neither can it be solely blamed for the clinical states so rightly deplored by Dr. Bicknell. We are entitled to take some satisfaction in the reduced wastage of life, particularly of mothers and children: but the rates of mortality are still too high, and we have far to go yet in improving not only nutrition but the whole framework of our social life before we can feel satisfied that we are making the best use of our human resources.

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valuable eugenic effects. I am not here arguing that acquired characteristics are inherited. I am saying that social changes that benefit the family will facilitate and encourage parenthood among just those couples whom we would wish to contribute a maximum share to the next generation.

There is a natural confluence of goods from actions which are themselves good. The eugenic good which will follow from encouraging innate genophilic impulses links with the good nurture enjoyed by the wanted and welcomed child. Or to put the argument the other way round, we can say that Lord Beveridge's five "giants" of Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, Idleness and Want, sterilize parenthood among just those elements of the population which are eugenically best fitted to be parents; and that they promote it among those which are least fitted. We can also say that the unwanted child reared in a home where the five "giants" hold sway too often grows up with its finest possibilities thwarted. The child favoured by "Nurture" may well have been first smiled upon by "Nature."

Essential features, then, of a community wherein eugenic values prevail are that the family be valued, that the economic handicaps of parenthood be minimized, that the mother be honoured, and that social justice prevail. But there is another feature. Parents should have the knowledge and the power of regulating the births of their

children; and they should know when genetic factors are adverse. They should have enlightenment—another "good." Here we meet a difficulty. Certain means of regulating births are condemned by religion. But it is no part of eugenics to prescribe such means. If there is agreement, as I believe there is, between all Christian religions about Ends, it is for each to determine those Means which accord with its teachings.

According to the view here suggested, the conflict disappears between the eugenicist and the social reformer, between those who seek to improve human nature and human nurture. The principles of eugenics become all the more acceptable. This standpoint was somewhat overlooked in the past but is gaining ground in England to-day.

I will end as I began with Galton. He was nurtured in the Evolution theory and gave much thought to the principle of Natural Selection. In an equitable environment which favoured parenthood and liberated the family from economic impediments, he would have discerned a favourable instrument of selection. But unlike the agencies of Nature, the instrument would here be man-made. It would favour the perpetuation of those qualities which we value not only in individuals but also in races and in nations, and which we would like to see prevail among our country's future citizens.

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